

REMARKS

This application has been reviewed in light of the Office Action dated March 22, 2006. Claims 94, 100, 104, 108 and 109 are presented for examination, of which Claims 94, 100 and 104 are in independent form. Claims 94, 100, 104 and 108 have been amended to define still more clearly what Applicant regards as his invention. Favorable reconsideration is requested.

Initially, the Office Action objects under 35 U.S.C. § 132 to the amended language of paragraphs [0026] and [0027] in the substitute specification (marked version) as adding new matter. In response, Applicants submit that the language in question (and the corresponding language in Claims 108 and 109) is fully supported by at least the following disclosure in the application as filed:

a first input section -- AP server 15 (Fig. 4) which executes steps S37 and S38 of Fig. 14;

a second input section -- AP server 15 which executes steps S53 to S55, or steps S57 to S59 of Fig. 15;

a database -- DB server 14 shown in Fig. 4;

a calculator -- the AP server 15 which executes step S89 of Fig. 17;

a generator -- the AP server 15 which generates data of an order screen shown in Fig. 7, in step S38 of Fig. 14; and

a provider -- the AP server 15 which executes step S38 of Fig. 14, and generates data of a confirmation screen shown in Fig. 12, in step S71 of Fig. 16 in response to an instruction of a user in step S36 of Fig. 14.

Thus, even though the exact language used in the paragraphs in question, and in Claims 108 and 109, may not be present in the original application, that language and those claims are fully supported, as required by 35 U.S.C. § 112, first paragraph. Accordingly, withdrawal of the objection to the specification and to Claims 108 and 109 is respectfully requested.

Claims 94, 100 and 104 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being obvious from admitted prior art (the conventional system described in the Background section) in view of U.S. Patent 6,567,787 (Walker et al.) alone or further in view of U.S. 2002/0007318 (Alnwick) or U.S. Patent 6,009,412 (Storey).¹

As is described in somewhat more detail in the application, the present invention is intended to mitigate or resolve various problems and inconveniences that have been encountered in conventional systems for the collecting of used office supplies such as toner cartridges, and other used portions or components of office machines. In particular, a number of such inconvenience arises because different models or types of machines provide for the collecting of different parts: one model may provide only for collecting used toner cartridges, while another may be structured so that the photosensitive drum, and possibly other elements as well, are included in the cartridge structure and thus are collected for re-processing or recycling along with the exhausted toner container.

Independent Claim 94 is directed to a server communicating with a plurality of client computers through a computer network, for discriminating log-in information received from each client computer, and transmitting data of an order screen used by a user

^{1/} Applicants understand that Claims 108 and 109 were not acted on in the Office Action because of the Examiner's belief that the recitations contained therein are new matter.

for the purpose of ordering a new consumable, to a logged-in client computer. The server of Claim 94 comprises a first input section, arranged to input order data inputted by a user who uses the order screen displayed on a monitor of the logged-in client computer, and a second input section, arranged to input collecting data of a used consumable returned from the user. A database stores the order data and the collecting data in relation with the log-in information, and a calculator calculates incentive data based on a plurality of the order data and a plurality of the collecting data stored in the database in a unit of the log-in information. Also provided are a generator, arranged to generate price data of the new consumable in accordance with the incentive in the unit of the log-in information, and a provider, which provides the logged-in client computer with the price data corresponding to the log-in information of that client computer to display a price of the new consumable on the order screen. In addition, the provider, in response to an instruction of the user, provides the logged-in client computer with data of a confirmation screen, which includes the order data, the collecting data, and the incentive data corresponding to the log-in information of that client computer, to report a collection rate of the used consumable, and the incentive data as a discount rate of a new consumable to the user.

Applicants do not deem it necessary to repeat in full their previous discussion of the cited prior art. Applicants note that an offer of incentive corresponding to a correcting condition of a used consumable in a unit of user is taught by AAPA. *Walker*, relating to a POS system, teaches managing the amount of money spent by a frequent shopper in a business, the number of visits to the business by the frequently shopper, and whether or not the frequent shopper has paid for a particular rating. The information of the frequent shopper is used to determine discounts or promotional offers, as described at n

col. 7, lines 27-44. *Alnwick* and *Storey* both teach an offer of discount points corresponding to on-line shopping via the Internet. Applicants understand the Examiner's view to be that informing the user of an incentive for discount corresponding to purchase of goods or correcting of the used consumable is taught by AAPA and the three mentioned patent documents.

Applicants point out that among other notable features of the apparatus of Claim 94 are (i) providing a logged-in client computer with price data considered incentive data to display a price of a new consumable on an order screen, and (ii) providing, in response to an instruction of a user, the logged-in client computer with data of a confirmation screen, which includes order data, collecting data, and the incentive data to report a collection rate of the used consumable, and the incentive data as a discount rate of a new consumable to the user. That is, the user not only can know the price of the new consumable by the order screen, but *also* knows both the collection rate of the used consumable, *and* the discount rate of the new consumable corresponding to the incentive data, from the confirmation screen. As a result, the apparatus of Claim 94 provides the additional benefit of further promoting collection of the used consumable is promoted.

Applicants submit that AAPA, *Walker*, *Alnwick* and *Storey* do not teach a confirmation screen that enables the user to confirm the collection rate or the discount rate at once, as can be achieved with the apparatus of Claim 94. Applicants note that according to the AAPA, the incentive corresponding to the collection rate is reported to a customer by mail (page 3, lines 2-5). Applicants believe that even if the proposed combination of the AAPA and *Walker*, *Alnwick* and *Storey* (even assuming that the proposed combination would be a proper one) would achieve sales promotion by reporting the incentive

corresponding to the collection rate, however, the *collecting* of the used consumable is not promoted by the combination. Since the proposed combination is not seen to teach or suggest an apparatus that, as recited in Claim 94, provides the described confirmation screen, Applicants strongly believe that that claim is allowable over the prior art applied against it.

Independent Claims 100 and 104 are method and program claims, respectively, corresponding to apparatus Claim 94, and are believed to be patentable for at least the same reasons as discussed above in connection with Claim 94.

The other claims in this application are each dependent from independent Claim 94, and are therefore believed patentable for the same reasons. Since each dependent claim is also deemed to define an additional aspect of the invention, however, the individual consideration of the patentability of each on its own merits is respectfully requested.

In view of the foregoing amendments and remarks, Applicants respectfully request favorable reconsideration and allowance of the present application.

Applicants' undersigned attorney may be reached in our New York Office by telephone at (212) 218-2100. All correspondence should continue to be directed to our address listed below.

Respectfully submitted,



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